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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CT](#)  
SUBJECT: MILITARY TRIBUNAL ACCUSES NOTORIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSER IN  
KILLING OF POLICE OFFICER

REF: 09 BANGUI 60

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On April 22, 2009 Lieutenant Olivier Koudoumon, aka Lt. Gbangouma, a member of President Bozize's Garde Presidentielle (GP), was officially accused of causing the death of a Commissar of Police on March 5, 2009. The killing sparked a day of riots in Bangui that left 10 wounded and at least thirty people jailed (09 BANGUI 60). Having cleared the military tribunal, the case will now go before a civilian court to decide if Gbangouma and his two enlisted accomplices are guilty of voluntary or involuntary murder. Following the adjournment of the proceedings, Gbangouma and the two other GP members remained at liberty. This case is being closely followed by the country as a whole as Gbangouma has long been a symbol of the impunity of those close to President Bozize. The outcome of the civilian trial may have a profound effect on the popular credibility of the Bozize regime. END SUMMARY

2. (SBU) The military trial of Gbangouma and the two soldiers who allegedly assaulted and killed a well respected police commissioner has been closely monitored by the press and the country as a whole. Gbangouma, an ex-`liberator' (the name given to those who fought with then-General Bozize during this seizure of power in 2003) has been cited in both the HHR of 2007 and 2008 for multiple violations of human rights. He is considered a prime example of how those with ties to Bozize are free to kill, rape, or steal without fear of punishment.

3. (SBU) The public hearing was held at Camp Beal, the administrative center of the Central African Army (FACA). During the hearing, only one witness came before the tribunal. The slain policeman's brother explained to POLOFF that this was so because every other witness was too frightened to testify. The witness claimed that Gbangouma in fact did not strike the Commissioner and only picked up the policeman's pistol as the two enlisted men pummeled the victim to death. When questioned by POLOFF if the testimony sounded credible, the policeman's brother, who was visibly scared, stated he had not been present, so he did not know. It is likely the brother knows many more details, and certainly that he has strong opinions, but his noticeable agitation at seeing Gbangouma only twenty feet away may explain his reticence to answer the question directly.

4. (SBU) When the finding of the tribunal was read, the court adjourned and the three men were allowed to leave. They will remain free until a civilian judge has treated the case. A well known human rights lawyer confirmed to POLOFF that this was common, but admitted the practice is flawed: There is nothing

that stops Gbangouma, his associates, or the GP from intimidating witnesses in the meantime. The lawyer, who is following the case closely, said much will depend on the judge who is selected to hear the trial. Two outcomes are possible: Gbangouma is determined to be guilty of accidental or premeditated homicide. The later calls for a prison sentence of three to twenty years and the former would likely mean the three would walk free. Only if an honest and well known judge is selected will the trial of Gbangouma be credible. The lawyer promised to remain in contact with Post about further developments.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: While it is possible that Gbangouma and his henchmen will be sacrificed by Bozize to placate a clearly frustrated public, Post does not believe this outcome likely. Bozize counts upon on the loyalty of GP officers like Gbangouma to assure his power and therefore allows them almost total impunity. It is probably within Bozize's power to assure that a malleable judge is assigned to the proceedings, thereby assuring a favorable outcome for his man.

16. (SBU) Yet with elections approaching, and Bozize's popularity seemingly at a low, it is not impossible to think he may throw Gbangouma to the wolves. This would be a very welcome sign as the human rights violations by people like Gbangouma are a serious detriment to the Central African Government's ability to rule. While Post hopes there will be a fair trial, Bozize's track record portends otherwise and a new spat of violence is a very real possibility if Gbangouma is found to be guilty of anything less than premeditated murder. END COMMENT

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